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**THE IDEA OF CULTURE AS A SENSE-
MAKING TOOL WHEN INDIVIDUALS
ACCOUNT FOR HOW THEY HAVE
INTEGRATED INTO FINNISH SOCIETY:**

Nationalist and cosmopolitan views attached to culture in
international students' integration accounts

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ABSTRACT

Victoria Kröger: The idea of culture as a sense-making tool when individuals account for how they have integrated into Finnish society: Nationalist and cosmopolitan views attached to culture in international students' integration accounts

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This thesis aims to investigate in what ways international students use culture as a sense-making tool when they account for their ability to integrate into Finnish society. Culture as a sense-making tool is a phrase used to describe the purpose of this study, which is to identify what meanings international students attach to culture and how they construct it. Current studies surrounding social integration focus on issues of cultural 'othering', although previous integration studies have mainly focused on marginalized migrant groups. There has been a lack of research done specifically on those classified as highly skilled migrants when concerning their experience with othering and social integration in general. International students are considered highly skilled migrants, and previous research regarding how they account for their ability to integrate into Finnish society is lacking. This thesis aims to fill the gap in existing social integration literature. I observe if international students place importance on differences between the culture that they are familiar with and the Finnish culture. If they do create differences, I aim to discover if these differences impact how they account their experiences of integration into Finnish society.

In order to investigate these aims, this thesis draws upon nationalism and cosmopolitanism theories. The data used in this thesis consists of qualitative interviews conducted with six international students. The interviews are semi-structured and have open-ended questions, which attempt to lead the participants into discussion about culture and cultural integration. The interviews were then transcribed using content analysis. The main findings showed that international students also suffer from 'othering' in similar ways to how marginalized migrant groups do during social and cultural integration. Findings showed that international students invoked both cosmopolitan and nationalist identities when discussing culture, however, the contexts varied. In some contexts, it was difficult to categorize what meanings the international students had attached to culture; therefore, some contexts were not identified as invoking specifically cosmopolitan or nationalist identities.

Keywords: international students, cultural integration, migration, othering, cosmopolitanism, nationalism

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. A short introduction to the problem/justification for study

With the ever-increasing ageing population and increased dependency rate in European countries, strain is put on their welfare systems (Boswell, 2005). As a result, this leads some European countries to turn to labor migration in order to fill the gap in the workforce (Ibid.). In immigration literature, cultural integration is often considered to be very important when discussing successful immigration (Algan et al., 2012). This thesis sets out to examine cultural integration from the perspective of international students experiencing it when integrating into Finland. Within the experience of cultural integration, I am particularly interested to discover how they use culture as a tool of reference when making sense of the new environment and their ability to adapt.

According to Kim (2003) culture is defined as a cluster of features such as beliefs, values, symbols unique to a particular human group and behavioral patterns. People often try to make sense of a new culture by making comparisons to the culture that they come from. This is supported by Kim (2004), who states that patterns governing behavior only enter into consciousness when they are a deviation from familiar concepts. In this sense, entering a new culture results in one becoming aware of the differences around them based on how they differ from one's own culture that they are already familiar with.

According to (Kim, 2004), entering a new culture requires the person to obtain a gradual acquisition of characteristics and norms of that culture or group. It is similar to learning the cultural norms of the culture that a person is already familiar with, however in the case of entering a new culture, the person is faced with situations that deviate from the internalized cultural script that they have already come to know (Ibid.). It is argued that a person entering a new culture will become aware of their previously taken for granted norms and habits that shaped the culture that they were previously a part of (Ibid.). In other words, patterns that oversee perception and behavior are only noticed when there is deviation from the familiar (Ibid.).

Culture is linked closely to integration (Gentin et al., 2019). Kyntäjä (2016), an expert and advisor for migration and integration issues in Finland, argues that a successful immigration policy in Finland would be one that commits all administrative branches to equality, non-discrimination, and prevents racism. She further argues that it is important that immigrants coming to Finland feel a

sense of belonging in the society (Ibid.). In this sense, the feeling of being equal and having a sense of belonging in a society should be taken into consideration when observing the feelings of those that have come to live in a new culture. On an even broader scale, integration in academic literature has been described as being comprised of the political, socio-economic, social, and cultural adaptations of newcomers in a society, along with the emergence of shared social relations, practices, and values (Wessendorf and Phillimore, 2019). It is also said that observations of the adaptation of newcomers and the long-settled population of a society are linked to these ideas included in the concept of integration (Ibid.).

Making up one of the dimensions of integration, according to Gentin et al. (2019), is social integration. Social integration is defined as referring to the relations that migrants create and establish once they have arrived in a new country (Wessendorf and Phillimore, 2019). For example, these can be relations with members of the receiving society or relations gained through associations or institutions. Social integration can be further categorized into four basic forms: cultural, identificational, structural, and interactive integration (Gentin et al., 2019).

From the categories that make up social integration, cultural integration relates to how well individuals are able to understand the language and general rules of the society, as they allow the person to navigate in the society (Heikkilä, 2005). Identificational integration refers to the sense of belonging that an individual can feel in the new society (Ibid.). Structural integration refers to access to common parts in society, such as education, labor market and health services (Ibid.). Interactive integration is related to the social aspects of integration, for example relationships and friendships in the society (Ibid.).

From the categories mentioned above, in this thesis, I am primarily interested in cultural integration, as it relates to the cultural aspect of integrating into a society (Heikkilä, 2005). One aspect of an immigrant successfully integrating into a society is linked to cultural participation in a society (Ibid.). In general, proper integration of an immigrant is important to research, as it is linked to the general wellbeing and mental health of immigrants, which in turn is also linked to them being able to gain a sense of meaning and belonging (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, 2019).

Previous literature regarding social integration has put forward the importance of acquisition of the host language when immigrants come to live in a new host country (Remennick, 2006). Learning the host language is said to be crucial to immigrants' economic success and in their process of social integration into the new, host society (Ibid.). It is further argued that those groups of people that become excluded due to lacking proper acquisition of the host language can begin to form their

own self-sufficient communities, which do not require the use of the host language (Ibid.). This is an issue, as it can result in further exclusion from the host society, and even more disincentive to learn the host language. Inevitably, in order to be able to function in an acceptable manner in the new culture, Kim (2004) argues that one must learn to relate to the new social environment and culture.

According to Kim (2003), without language, culture of a society cannot be fully acquired, expressed, or transmitted. In this sense, it is important to take into account the influence of language when researching aspects of culture. In truth, it is also important to note that cultures are not static, as they can change forms and acquire new characteristics overtime. Previous literature also links culture to the concept of identity, as Kim (2003) describes culture as the site where identities can be mobilized, constructed and reworked. In this way, the possible fluctuation of one's identity is a key concept to consider when observing how culture is used as a tool by immigrants when they integrate into a new society. Although this thesis is primarily focused on culture, identities are formed within culture, therefore it is important to define it as a concept. Identity scholarship argues that interests, preferences, and norms structures are interlinked with the identities invoked by actors (Bucher & Jasper, 2017). Identities are considered to be multifaceted, consisting of individual, social, and interpersonal processes that are embedded within social structures (Davis et al., 2019).

According to Penninx (2019) current studies surrounding social integration focus on issues of cultural othering, emphasizing the problematization of migrant 'others'. 'Othering' refers to defining one's own identity by excluding oneself from the person not considering as belonging to this identity. Othering occurs when a society excludes certain people or groups that they do not feel fits into its society (Dervin, 2012). In this sense, current studies use othering to describe cultural barriers that immigrants can face. Such studies pay attention to how othering compares non-native populations of people to the native population, and how the immigrant population coming into a country in question hence copes culturally (and in general) in comparison to the native population of countries (Ibid.).

As already mentioned, previous literature has discussed how aspects closely linked to culture such as language and identity can influence social integration for immigrants. However, there is a lack of research concerning how one's own culture that they are familiar with can be used as a sense-making tool when learning how to cope in a new society and culture. *In this thesis, I study, how international students studying in Finland invoke the idea of culture when accounting for their ability to adapt to the new environment.* In this study, culture is not referred to as something static or concrete, but rather, its form fluctuates based how it is described by people in their accounts on

how they have experienced it. Hence, culture as a sense-making tool refers to the meanings that people attach to culture, and how they construct it from their point of view.

According to Kim (2004), when a person enters a new culture, the process of acculturation occurs, which results in the new learning of the culture of the new society which then leads to the unlearning of some old cultural elements of the culture that the person is familiar with. It could be suggested from this that in order to adapt to the new culture, one has to unlearn aspects of their own familiar culture and replace them with aspects of the new culture. In this sense, when learning a new culture, a person could consider some aspects of their familiar culture to not be suitable for coping in the new culture. In this sense, unlearning of those aspects can take place.

From this, it could be further suggested that when one attempts to integrate into a new culture, they could compare the new culture to the culture that they are familiar with. As stated by Kim (2004) when one attempts to integrate into a new society, they have to learn to relate to the new culture. To my knowledge, there is a lack of research about this, thus in this thesis, I seek to advance the debate on this topic. I want to contribute to research by studying immigrants coming to Finland and observing how they use culture as a tool and frame of reference when attempting to integrate into Finnish society.

According to Wahlbeck (2007), the Finnish labor market is mostly closed to immigrants, and this leads to immigrants ending up turning to becoming self-employed in the fast-food or restaurant sector. In this way, separate ethnic economies are formed in Finland, as immigrants are marginalized from the general Finnish labor market. Additionally, in a questionnaire conducted by Valtonen (2010), which asked trade unions, employers' associations and selected employers in the private and public sector's reasons for high unemployment among immigrants in Finland 45% of respondents said that there was a perceptions by employers that immigrants lack language and vocation skills. In this sense, it is at times automatically assumed that immigrants will not have the skills that Finnish employers are looking for despite if they actually are qualified (Ibid.). In sum, in Finland, immigrants in the mainstream interpretations are not seen as possessing proper vocational skills (Ibid.). In 2015, the immigration program in Finland was represented through othering representations of asylum seekers, and this was done in order to try to reduce benefits provided to these groups and other migrant groups (Keskinen, 2016). In this way, Finnish media tends to portray migrants as marginalized groups that are a burden to society (Ibid.).

In that context, international students make an interesting group of people to study when discussing integration, as they differ from this mainstream interpretation of immigrants in Finland. According

to Habti & Koikkalainen (2014), international students are often categorized and presumed to be highly skilled migrants. In this sense, it would benefit the Finnish workforce and Finnish society to study international students in particular, as learning their experiences in coping in a new culture would in turn lead to understanding how to help them integrate more smoothly. Another justification for this study is due to the fact that according to Habti & Koikkalainen (2014), the topic of mobility and migration of highly skilled persons has risen to the top in importance of policy agendas all over the world, as it has now come to be realized that the transfer of talent and knowledge is vital to competitiveness and growth. Hence, in this thesis, I aim to contribute to discussions which look at how highly educated individuals cope with social and cultural integration. From the previously mentioned observations of Kim (2004), for example, it can be seen that the topic of integrating into a new culture has been studied in previous literature. Shumilova et al. (2012) provided an analysis of various integration issues that international students have faced in Finland. They focused on bureaucratic issues that international students face due to residence permit limitations, closed professional networks, and difficulties adapting to academic and working culture (Ibid.). Despite that, there has been little, in-depth previous research conducted on how culture in itself becomes a tool that helps in coping in a new society for international students during integration. There is also lack of in-depth research focusing specifically on the prospect of cultural barriers and cultural differences as a key determinant of issues during integration into a new society. Although Shumilova et al., (2012) do mention cultural differences potentially having a negative effect on international students' ability to integrate in Finland, they focus more on the economic impact of cultural differences rather than the overall meanings attached to culture during integration. With my thesis, I therefore aim to fill the gap in the existing literature by looking at the role culture can play when individuals account for their ability to integrate into a new society. This knowledge may be further used by experts and decision-makers when they design future integration policies.

The topic of cultural differences and their influence is especially relevant when studying Finland, since, overall, the population of Finland is thought to be more ethnically homogenous than other populations in many European countries (Heikkilä, 2005). According to Väestöliitto (2019), about 3% of inhabitants in Finland are of a foreign nationality. Additionally, although the number of foreign people in Finland has tripled since 1990, it is still in proportion the smallest in Europe (Jasinkaja-Lahti et al., 2007). In this sense, it is justified to research cultural impact further, as it is important to study how cultural differences can be impactful in a relatively homogenous population.

Additionally, culture is an important concept in general, as according to Meyer (1997), from a macrorealist perspective, the world is driven partly by a collective cultural sphere.

Prior to the 1980s, Finland was mainly considered as a country of emigration rather than immigration (Kyntäjä, 2016). Despite that, immigration patterns have changed over the years. There has been an increase in the flow of immigrants for example in migrant workers, students, refugees and asylum seekers (Koski & Koski, 2013). According to Study in Finland (2018), there are 20 000 international students studying in Finland. Finland in being considered as a country of immigration is still perceived to be a relatively new situation, and this is used as a reason to explain people's attitude in Finland being perceived to be slightly negative towards immigration in general (Kaari & Ollanketo, 2018).

According to a survey conducted by Shumilova et al. (2012), which gathered responses from foreign students, it was found that respondents cited that the integration challenges which they faced could also be subdivided into challenges of coping with differences in academic culture, Finnish working culture and integrating into Finnish society (Ibid.). Employers that were investigated claimed that it is usually challenging for people from other countries to adapt to Finnish straightforwardness, lower degree of supervision, and flat hierarchy (Ibid.). Heikkilä (2005) argues that there is a presence of ethnic ranking in the labor market, which results in employers employing local people as their first choice and following this are then nationalities that appear to be proximate to their own culture. This appears to be the result of recruiters feeling closer to immigrants that share cultural proximity with Finnish culture (Ibid.). In this sense, nationalities that appear more distant culturally are more likely to be excluded (Ibid.). Additionally, it was found by the Centre for International Mobility in 2016 that many foreign degree students would like to stay in Finland and find employment after they graduate (Kaari & Ollanketo, 2018) The issue, however, is that foreign graduate students and companies that have no interest in recruiting foreign students do not appear to intersect (Ibid.). In this sense, issues related to cultural differences can create problems in gaining employment opportunities in Finland.

The rest of the thesis will proceed as follows. First, I introduce the theoretical frameworks informing my study. After that, I present the aim of this study and the research questions in more detail. Following this, I introduce the data and methods used in my enquiry. In the findings section, I present my results, that is, the distinct ways in which the idea of culture is invoked in international students' integration accounts and the distinctive meanings attached to culture. In the discussion and conclusions section, I summarize my main findings and link them to the findings made in the

existing literature. I also present my contributions to existing debates and present possible future objects of research.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Cosmopolitanism

Cultural integration can be linked to cosmopolitanism theory and perspectives, as the concept of cosmopolitanism arose through the appearance of increased connectivity and contact with different cultures intertwining all over the world (Chan, 2002). One of the aims in this thesis is to observe how the perception of culture is described by international students. Cosmopolitanism suits this aim especially, as many discourses discussing cosmopolitanism describe it as a term that explains the growing interconnection of the world (Calhoun, 2008). Additionally, according to Lamont & Aksartova (2002), in literature, cosmopolitanism is generally referenced when a person is said to have an allegiance to a world community among humanity. In this way, if one were to take a stance linked to ideas from cosmopolitanism theory, one would speak about culture existing on a more global scale and perspective. Calhoun (2008) argues that cosmopolitanism signals a common identity and unity in all humanity and, therefore, it allows one to potentially feel at ease in many parts of the world despite different and diverse influences, and to appreciate diversity among people, cultures and societies. In this regard, I am using cosmopolitanism theory in this thesis to observe if the interviewed international students speak about culture in a way that defines it as being present on a more global scale. I am also looking to observe if international students describe themselves as being cosmopolitan when discussing culture.

This notion of feeling at ease or “at home” is an interesting concept to explore when considering how well integrated a person has come to be in a society. As mentioned previously, cosmopolitanism explores this phenomenon, and in fact, according to Halsall (2009), having a cosmopolitan attitude is said to be the opposite of what one would feel if they were to experience culture shock. Culture shock, a concept first coined by Oberg in the 1950’s, is defined as occurring in a situation when a person entering a different culture experience a feeling of confusion and disorientation (Moufakkir, 2013).

Culture shock is usually described as a negative state for one to be in, however some have argued that it can be an opportunity for cultural learning or personal growth (Moufakkir, 2013). Although cosmopolitanism is the theoretical focus of this thesis and not culture shock, it is still important to

take into consideration that culture shock can occur during process of one integrating to a new society, and according to Zhou et al. (2008), the concept in itself has led to the emergence of theoretical approaches concerning how one learns a new culture, stress and coping, and social identification, which are focuses in this thesis and linked to cosmopolitanism as well.

Drawing on cosmopolitanism literature, I ask to what extent do students give the idea of culture (national or global) as a sense-making tool when accounting for their experiences in integrating in Finnish society. I am using cosmopolitanism as a theoretical framework for my thesis, as culture in general is in some instances described in us vs. them terms, or more specifically in the case of this thesis, Finnish culture being compared to foreign cultures (Shumilova et al., 2012). I go deeper into literature describing cosmopolitanism in order to analyze how discourse surrounding cosmopolitanism describes the meaning of identity. I then attempt to use the findings of the literature as a framework in order to empirically analyze what meanings are attached to culture as well. From this, I can then observe effectively how international students identify themselves when describing their experiences.

According to Holley (2018), in the area of social sciences, migration is described as the human representation of globalization. Globalization, in this sense, is described as the phenomenon that has brought about a huge transformation in how nation-states are perceived, citizenship, ways of communication, and social and political relations. According to World Health Organization (2020), globalization is defined as the increased interconnectedness and interdependence of nation-states and peoples; it is understood that this in turn has allowed international borders to open, allowing changes in institutions, policies at national and international levels, and increasingly flows of goods, services, people, to name a few. From this, it can be argued that cosmopolitanism is linked to globalization, as increased interconnectedness of societies has allowed for migrants to become cosmopolitan, since they are less likely to be bound to individual nation-states nowadays.

Van den Anker (2010) suggests that the increase in the notion of cosmopolitanism is linked to the increase in transnational migration. Migrants that have moved to another nation-state for example have ties to several different communities that transcend national borders. In this sense, he argues that transnationalism is responsible for creating cosmopolitan motivations (Ibid.). Additionally, he argues from this that global citizenship is developed through a combination of one having ties to several different nation-states, as these ties morally reinforce global citizenship (Ibid.).

Due to this phenomenon of globalization, it is argued by Holley (2018) that there is now a renewed interest in the concept of cosmopolitanism as well. Despite that, he argues that it is difficult to

define cosmopolitanism in one way as it can often become too vague or abstract, therefore he suggests trying to look at it from a more empirical and practical point of view (Ibid.). He also states that cosmopolitanism should be viewed as an occasionally expressed perspective which can only be theorized in relation to contexts when it arises, therefore, it is compared to titles such as nationhood, race, or ethnicity (Ibid.). He describes cosmopolitanism as a concept that is used by individuals that are trying to make sense of their circumstances, therefore according to this, one can essentially describe themselves as being cosmopolitan in certain circumstances (Ibid.).

Further, Holley (2018) uses a narrative-discursive approach in order to attempt to define more accurately who in fact can be described as a cosmopolitan person. He links cosmopolitanism to the concept of identity, and describes identity as being derived from ideas, images and associations that make up social and cultural contexts in people's lives (Ibid.). Additionally, he stresses that identities are not simply something that a person possesses, but rather, they are complex constructions through which a person produces an image of themselves that they in turn present to society (Ibid.). Through conducting narrative interviews, he concluded that cosmopolitanism for each participant was a way to express their constructed identity, which in their cases extended the boundaries of individual nation-states (Ibid.). In this sense, the idea of cosmopolitanism is not something fixed to a certain group of people or a place, but rather, it can suit different purposes, and it is used for self-presentation by actors in this example.

Lamont & Aksartova (2002) highlight, however, that moral commitments in this case refer not to one's abstract moral decisions, but rather, in their moral commitments to universalisms. Despite that, in reference to the notion of universalisms, Van den Anker (2010) remarks that theories of cosmopolitanism face critique due to being argued to have an impartial view that ignores differences in favor of universalizing a model of justice that is developed in a Western context. This is supported by Bowden (2003), who argues that through essentially embracing all values, cosmopolitanism lacks them. Additionally, cosmopolitanism has been criticized for often being represented from biased, Western perspectives (van den Anker, 2010).

Cosmopolitanism is often described in contrast to nationalism, as nationalism is portrayed as what forms a boundary between groups of people in an 'us' vs 'them' mechanism (Lamont & Aksartova, 2002). In this sense, cosmopolitanism also expresses tensions between moral obligations that one has to their local origins versus the obligations they have to the rest of the world on the other hand. This description of nationalism vs. cosmopolitanism is supported by findings of Holley (2018), as one participant in the narrative interviews he conducted described nationalism as having negative connotations, as one with a nationalist point of view was claimed by the participant to be a narrower

view on the world; this was in contrast to when one describes themselves as being an international person, which was considered to be much more positive. The other participant in the narrative interview had a similar view on perceiving international as more beneficial than describing oneself in a nationalistic perspective, however he used language such as calling himself a ‘citizen of the world’ (Holley, 2018).

In summary, the main use of this theoretical framework in this thesis is to observe if international students use the cosmopolitan language when referring to themselves, and if they identify with a global, cosmopolitan culture. It is also important to observe, from my empirical data, if the participants use language that describes them as belonging to a larger, global culture, identifying as a global citizen, or other cosmopolitan-related language. From cosmopolitan theory, the following questions can be posed to my empirical data:

1. To what extent do international students speak about culture in a way that defines it as being linked to a shared, global culture?
2. When discussing culture and cultural integration in Finland, do international students describe themselves as identifying with cosmopolitan ideas? Do they describe identifying with cultural ideas that could be linked to global culture or global citizenship?
3. If the international students describe differences between their culture and the culture in Finland, do they still consider themselves to feel at ease in Finnish society despite having noticed cultural differences?

2.2. Nationalism

On the other hand, another important theme to keep in mind when researching the role of culture in individuals’ sense-making accounts is not only cosmopolitanism, but on the other side of the coin, nationalism and the idea of preserving a national identity. According to Nielsen (2015), although borders of states can be questioned, the overall design and concept that borders should be in place and, additionally, that they lead to formation of and conforming to particular identities of the people that live within the borders, is generally accepted. In this sense, nationalism has become adopted by various populations, and it has become an idea that is so convincing that it is rarely questioned that nationalism and the idea of nations may need to be maintained in some way (Ibid.) She mentions the idea of a “national order of things” when referring to a world where everyone will or should possess a nationality in the same way that they have a gender (Ibid.).

According to Kymlicka & Straehle (1999) it has been suggested in history that people are willing to make sacrifices for kin, and from this, liberal nationalists argue that this has been provided by the existence of the notion of national identity, as it creates a common identity and trust; further, liberal nationalists claim that no other form of social identity has been able to motivate continuing sacrifices to the level that kin groups have been shown to express. They argue that national identity has remained prevalent in modern society due to its emphasis on the people of the nation, which in turn provides dignity to those that are native to nation-states (Ibid.). They also claim that membership in a national culture provides meaning to choices that one makes in the social practices that surround them, and further, the national identity provides a type of self-identification which also gives a sense of secure belonging (Ibid.).

Malkki (1995) discusses how national identity is especially relevant for people who cannot claim belonging to a particular state. She refers to refugees but also to stateless people in general. She defines stateless people as any person who is not considered by any nation-state to possess their nationalities (Ibid.). She argues that the ultimate Other would be an individual that does not have a nation at all (Ibid.). Nielsen (2015) states that nation-states have been discussed by scholars as possibly being threatened by the emergence of globalization, as due to the phenomenon they could be replaced by a more global society. According to Meyer et al. (1997), there is considerable evidence which supports that world society models already influence the identities, behavior and structures of nation-states through worldwide cultural processes.

Despite that, according to Nielsen (2015), the existence of nation-states is still prevalent over statelessness, as the idea of having nations seems to be such a predominant idea that many people cannot imagine other possibilities of. Bowden (2003) also argues that nationalities and national identities are solely dependent upon the abundant national identities that stretch outside of the nation's borders. Additionally, nation-states are a method of organizing people, and identities in groups are defined by what one is and what they are not (Nielsen, 2015). This in turn leads to the process of othering those that are not considered as belonging to groups, which is in a sense how nationalisms are often promoted and defined (Ibid.). Additionally, she argues that there is the issue that a global society would leave people without an "Other" to exclude, and therefore an essential aspect of how identities are formed would be missing (Ibid.).

On the other hand, according to Malkki (1995), concepts pertaining to internationalism in fact reinforce and legitimate the idea of nation-state and nationalism. An example provided by Calhoun (2008) is the 2001 terrorist attacks, which showed that globalization can lead to renewed nationalism through strengthening of borders due to the fearing those that do not fit the nationalist

ideal may be terrorists. Beck (2002) adds that depictions of terrorist enemies are de-nationalized and de-territorialized, and in this sense, they are represented as not belonging to a nation which in turn allows for global interventions to be used in self-defense. On the contrary, although global risks such as terrorism cause national borders to strengthen due to fear, by other means they reduce national boundaries, as the global risks themselves force native populations to interact with foreign actors affected (Ibid.). This, in turn, requires them to work together in order to eliminate risks that transcend national borders (Ibid.).

The concept of the ‘Other’ in articles by Malkki (1995) and Nielsen (2015) refer to stateless people. This can be compared to the idea of a cosmopolitan person, as, according to this, a cosmopolitan person could also be identified as an Other in a society where nations are still prevalent. On the other hand, Calhoun (2008) claims nations and states are now deeply influenced by migration and multiculturalism in the sense that it becomes difficult to talk of belonging to a particular nation or to emphasize belonging to anything that is any less than the world as a whole. In this way, one can argue that he is claiming that nationalism is impacted by the emergence of cosmopolitanism. All in all, Bowden (2003) argues that neither nationalism nor cosmopolitanism alone can provide satisfactory solutions to humanity’s needs. He argues that the two dominant paradigms of cosmopolitanism and nationalism should come together in a unifying force, at least in the mind, in order to be able to consider the ideologies from a new perspective (Ibid.). Overall, the main use of this theoretical framework is to bring the contrasting arguments of nationalism to light, as it would be otherwise difficult to fully understand cosmopolitanism. In this regard, I use nationalism theory in this thesis to observe if the interviewed international students speak about and invoke culture in a way that describes it as being associated with nationalist ideas.

Drawing on the theories in this section, I pose the following questions to my empirical data:

1. To what extent do international students speak about culture in a way that defines it as being related to nationalistic ideas about culture? Is ‘othering’ and exclusion present in their discussions?
2. Do the international students speak about or invoke national identities?
3. When discussing culture and cultural integration in Finland, do international students describe themselves as identifying with nationalist ideas? Do they place importance on the presence of differences between their culture and the culture of Finland and if so, do they describe the differences in such a way that they are described as being a hindrance on their integrating into Finland?

3. AIM OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this thesis, I aim to analyze how international students invoke the idea of culture when accounting for how they have or have not integrated into Finnish society. I also aim to analyze how international students identify themselves through observing if they notably express that the new, Finnish culture feels different from the culture that they grew up in and are familiar with. If the students express notable differences, I want to observe if they place importance on these differences in their accounts on their abilities to feel integrated in Finnish society. Additionally, I will also observe if the international students mention ideas related to cosmopolitanism or nationalism.

From my empirical data, I aim to analyze if there appears to be discussion suggesting the existence of a shared, global culture instead of separate cultures, as previous literature on culture has been contradictory on this matter. In this way, I observe if the idea of global citizenship plays a role in how international students identify themselves when discussing culture. On the other hand, I also aim to analyze if there are elements in my analysis that relate to nationalist theories. For example, I examine if the international students invoke nationalist ideas when discussing Finnish culture or the culture that they are familiar with.

Structural identity framework has emphasized that identity emerges from social interactions, and it reflects the quality and structure where interaction occurs. Identity commitment is described as the strength of the ties that one has to an organized network of social relations. On the contrary, however, there is the concept of identity salience, which suggests that a person's identity may be invoked across or in social situations. (Owens, 2000) In this sense, it is important to research not only the influence of cultural differences on the lives of international students, but also to observe in what ways they invoke their cultural identities when exposed to integrating into the new, Finnish culture. The term foreign student and international student will be used interchangeably to refer to students that have come to Finland from another country.

According to Habti and Koikkalainen (2014), the dominant culture is described as the one that is most prevalent in a society as a result of holding the most symbolic or other type of power. In the case of Finland, the dominant culture would be the Finnish culture (Ibid.). As a result of these findings, I will not focus on a specific background or group of students (e.g. European, Asian), as it appears that any other culture will differ in some ways when compared to the dominant culture of a society, and I would like to observe this without restriction.

The research questions in this thesis will be:

1. How do international students use culture as a sense-making tool when accounting for how they have or have not integrated into Finnish society?
2. How do international students construct culture: do they describe differences between their own, local culture that they are familiar with and their interpretation of the Finnish culture, or do they lean more in the direction that they speak about all cultures being interconnected on a global scale? If they place importance on differences between the culture that they are familiar with and the Finnish culture, are they still able to feel at ease in many different cultures, or do they describe the cultural differences as hindering their ability to integrate into Finnish society? Do the arguments put forward in cosmopolitanism or nationalism theories appear in the debates where the students make sense of their ability to adapt to their new environment? In particular, do they identify themselves more with the concept of global citizenship or with national identity?
3. What are the different contexts and situations in which culture is invoked as a factor impacting integration? Are cosmopolitan and nationalist views more prominent in some contexts than others? Are there some contexts when neither view is clearly identifiable? Are there instances when a context cannot be identified as being clearly either cosmopolitan or nationalistic in nature?

4. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

In my attempts to study how individuals used culture as a sense-making tool when to integrating to a new environment, I conducted interviews with international students. My primary data was taken from analyzing approximately 20-minute-long, open-ended question-style interviews. These interviews were conducted with six international students that have come to Finland to study. The interviews were collected through invitation via a student association at Tampere University. In the interviews, I did not ask questions that directly asked about culture or how the international students accounted for their experiences in integrating to Finland, however, I did try to lead participants into discussion related to culture and cultural integration. Once on this topic, I asked the participants to describe their feelings and opinions on culture and integrating into Finnish society. The main themes addressed from the interviews were:

Theme 1: Talk related to Finnish culture and society in general

Theme 2: Sense of belonging spoken about in a positive light

Theme 3: Sense of belonging spoken about in a negative light

Theme 4. Adaptability and integration- to what extent the interviewee felt that they were able to adapt in new situations and integrate into cultures

Theme 5: Discussion surrounding language and the problems that language can cause in the integration process.

Theme 6: Globalization and cosmopolitanism-related topics

From these themes, I was able to study if the participants described or viewed culture in Finland as being different from the culture that they grew up in and were familiar with. Additionally, how their experience and perceptions of culture affects their integration into Finnish society can also be studied.

In this thesis, I chose to use a qualitative data approach. Qualitative researchers focus on the meaning that people attach to things in their lives. I chose this data method for analyzing how culture is used as a sense-making tool by international students, as I aimed to observe the personal experiences of the international students regarding this. In this sense, the strength of using a qualitative data approach is that it allowed for a less-structured interview style and observation of the participants on a more personal level. In this regard, the approach allows more freedom for the participants to speak for themselves. (Taylor et al., 2015)

The limitations of using a qualitative approach concerns the lack of ability to find clear trends, statistics and correlations related to the study. A qualitative data approach can also be difficult to analyze, as it is up to the interpretations of those that analyze the data. It is also more likely that one will need to obtain consent by interviewees in the case of qualitative data analyses. Additionally, this study only has six participants, therefore the sample size lacks larger representation. (Taylor et al., 2015)

However, despite these limitations, it should be noted that as a qualitative research study, the lack of sample size is, in fact, beneficial to the quality of the data in this case. Less students interviewed allows me to analyze the talk more thoroughly. For the study, the data becomes richer since participants can speak in more detail about their personal accounts, as mentioned previously. Additionally, qualitative research is concerned with the meanings that people attach to things in their life, and this can be directly linked to the aim of my thesis, as I am seeking to observe what meanings international students attach to culture during cultural integration into Finland. The aim of

this study focuses on observing detailed, personal accounts of the international students; in this way, a small group of students is optimal for my study. (Taylor et al., 2015)

I chose to start the interview transcriptions from the point when the first question is asked to the interviewee. Prior to this, I confirmed with the interviewee that they had given their consent to being interviewed, agreed to the interview being recorded and that they had read the participant consent form. In the participant consent form, I also briefly outlined what the topic of the interview would entail.

The interviews are recorded and then transcribed in “Verbatim” style (Transcription Centre, 2019). In this case, “Verbatim” refers to a style of transcribing, which includes everything that is said in the transcript, exactly how the speakers say it (Ibid.). In a full verbatim style, hesitation markers, grammatical errors, and repetitions are also included (Ibid.).

Despite using primarily verbatim style in my transcription, I chose to omit words if I considered them to be repeated too many times in a row. Certain phrases and parts that are not considered to be important to the data analysis were omitted from the transcriptions. Excessive use of the words such as “um, like” and other filler words were also omitted if I considered them to be used repetitively. I did not replace colloquial expressions, however.

I chose to use this less strict style of transcription while still trying to be as accurate as possible because I am not focusing on studying the syntax used by speakers, but rather, the aim of my transcription was to identify the main points and arguments put forward by speakers. In this way, adding grammatical errors and repetitions would have been a distraction to the data analysis.

Once transcribed, the interviews were coded in order to find the common themes that they had amongst each other. These themes were organized around the contexts in which culture was referred to. According to Saldana (2009) coding allows data to be summarized and condensed. The themes gathered from coding were related to culture and integration, as these are the main areas of focus in this thesis. The themes found are then placed into categories of culturally related topics.

The type of analysis that is used when coding, unpacking themes, and analyzing the transcriptions of the interviewees is content analysis. In research, content analysis can be used to calculate the occurrence of particular words, phrases, topics or concepts in texts (Scribbr, 2019) Additionally, content analysis finds patterns in how concepts are communicated (Ibid.). From the transcriptions, I examined if the interviewees invoked the idea of culture in ways expressed by cosmopolitanism and

nationalism theories. This analysis is based on how often they mention the culturally related topics and issues important to them, therefore content analysis is suitable for my thesis.

In the actual analysis, in some places I used euphemistic expressions in order to project the identities of my interviewees. For example, I replaced tcountry names with names of continents or regions my interviewees come from. I also replaced the names of family members such as ‘sister’ or ‘boyfriend’ with more general terms like ‘family member’ or ‘relative’ in order to further anonymize my interviewees. The aspects of anonymization are further discussed in Section 7, where I discuss the ethical considerations related to my thesis.

4.1. Data collection method

Six interviews were conducted and transcribed to be used for primary data in this thesis. A template of interview questions is created in order to create a main theme and flow during the interviews. The interview style was semi-structured, and questions were open-ended (Adams, 2015). I did, however, ask all the questions that I had written down to all the participants at some point in all of the interviews.

Due to the interviews being conducted in March 2020 during the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, interviews were conducted on Skype rather than following the original plan suggesting that they would take place at the university.

5. FINDINGS

As stated previously, the aim of this thesis is to analyze the meanings attached to culture when international students account for how they have or have not integrated into Finnish culture and society. In order to make my findings more comprehensible, I organized them around the distinct contexts or situations in which such talk was present. As mentioned previously, identity salience suggests that a person’s identity may be invoked across or in social situations. (Owens, 2000). In this sense, it is important to research not only the influence of cultural differences on the lives of international students, but also to observe in what ways they invoked their identities when they entered the new, Finnish culture.

From the transcribed research interviews, the aim is to identify if the interviewed international students made a difference between their own local culture and their interpretations of what makes up the Finnish culture. I aimed to observe if the interviewees refer and use the culture that they are familiar with as a starting point when trying to understand and make sense of the new culture in Finland. I am also interested to discover whether they perceive culture in a cosmopolitan way. Further, I wanted to pinpoint in what contexts and instances in the interviews the interviewees mentioned and described culture.

In that regard, I ask: Do the interviewees have a cosmopolitan or nationalist approach when referring to how they perceive culture? Additionally, were they ‘self-identifying’ cosmopolitans or nationalists? Did they identify themselves as possessing cosmopolitan or nationalist identifications? Are there contexts in which specific identities are invoked more than others?

Before more closely examining the results of the data collected, I next present brief summaries of the interviews conducted in order to help the reader grasp the overall contents of the interviews.

5.1. Brief summaries of the 6 interviews conducted

Interview 1

Interviewee 1 is an international student originally from Central Europe.

In terms of identity and sense of belonging in Finnish society, the interviewee expresses more positive than negative feelings. They mention several times that they feel very at home in Finland, and that they feel a great sense of belonging.

In terms of prior knowledge of the culture of Finland before arriving, the interviewee did not have much knowledge about Finland besides the heavy stereotypes such as “Finns are reserved, drink a lot and carry knives”. Despite that, the interviewee expresses that they feel that the way of life in Finland is not that different from how it was in their home country in Central Europe. They feel that there are a lot of cultural overlaps with their home country in Central Europe and Finland. They feel that the culture of countries in Central Europe and Finland be quite similar. Similar weather is mentioned several times as a reason for having a shared culture between Central Europe and Finland.

Although the interviewee expresses a strong sense of belonging, discussion of adaptability and integration in Finnish society had mixed answers. The interviewee expresses feeling that they feel a

sense of belonging and identity within the community of international students existing in their university. They also express feelings, however, that the university is a closed circle in itself due to there not being a lot of engagement with the Finnish students that are not part of the international student degree programs.

The interviewee mentions Finnish language as being a big barrier despite also positively mentioning that everyone speaks English. They feel a strong sense of belonging in the university community of International Students, however they also state that it is difficult to think about how they feel about their integration into the wider Finnish society outside of the university community.

Overall, interviewee 1 makes references to their own culture when considering how to understand Finnish culture. Ultimately, they conclude by saying that Finnish culture is quite similar to Central Europe's due to it being a Nordic country. They do mention some differences in Finnish culture, such as stating that Finnish people are even more reserved and calm than people in Central Europe.

Despite that, the interviewee does not place importance on the differences between the cultures, and in general, the interviewee believes to feel that there is cultural overlap between Central Europe and Finland's culture. In terms of a cosmopolitan approach, although the interviewee expresses in multiple instances that they believed that there was a very similar and shared culture between Nordic countries, they do not express the same feeling for other Western societies, stating that there are already big differences in those compared with the Nordic countries.

Finally, although the interviewee does not feel as if they identified with Finnish society as a whole, but rather, the university community, this did not seem to have a noticeable impact on their sense of belonging. The interviewee mentioned all throughout the interview that they felt very at home in Finland.

Interview 2

Interviewee 2 is an international student originally from a country located in North America.

Prior to coming to Finland, the interviewee expressed that they did not know much about Finland and the way of life there in general. It was just known to them that there would be a higher quality of life and more free time compared with when they lived in North America.

Regarding culture, the interviewee mentions that they feel that the Finnish way of life is perceived as a more relaxed and chill way of life compared to North American standards. In North America, the interviewee states that the cultural norm is that of always having to keep busy, move fast, and

have multiple jobs. It is a culture surrounded around the notion of being busy, whereas in Finland, they state that there is a more focus on work-family life and higher quality of life in general.

Rather interestingly, although the interviewee mentions Nordic and Scandinavian countries when referring to how they are rated highly in quality of life and happiness, they mention that they feel that this to be the case in Europe in general and not just Finland.

In terms of integration into Finnish society, the interviewee identifies as being a part of the university community. They feel that being a student in Finland is a notably different experience compared with if one were to move to Finland for a job. The interviewee states that the university was their biggest way into being introduced to Finnish society.

Despite that, the interviewee feels that the university has certain confines, and in that sense, they do not feel as if they have seen what the rest of Finnish society is like outside of the university. They express that their place in Finnish society is as a student, and aside from the community of the university, they do not feel included in Finnish society in general. The interviewee expresses language as being the biggest barrier into not feeling a part of Finnish society outside of the university community.

In terms of adaptability, the interviewee considers themselves to be a rather adaptable person that can be comfortable in any country, as they grew up with family in many different countries, and they had lived in many different places prior to Finland.

Although the interviewee places importance on differences, and, in this sense, does create importance in cultural differences between North American culture and Finnish culture, they do not consider the differences to be a hindrance when trying to adapt to life in Finland. Despite stating that they do not feel as if they belong in Finnish society aside from the university community, they felt that they have been able to find a community within the university that they can identify and belong to.

The interviewee does not mention a feeling that there was a shared, global culture between the culture that they were brought up in and Finnish culture. They mention how they notice clear differences between the two cultures in general.

Interview 3

Interviewee 3 is an international student originally from a country in Asia.

When speaking about culture and living in Finland, the interviewee expresses that they feel at home in Finland, however they feel this way due to the fact that it is so different from their home country. The interviewee expresses how they hated living in Asia due there being a lack of social distancing and a culture of people intruding on other people's lives. Regarding this, the interviewee mentions enjoying and feeling much more at home in Finland due to the peace and quiet that it offers in comparison to Asia.

Peace and quiet are mentioned several times as a huge draw for the interviewee feeling at home in Finland. Another draw is the interviewer's family member already living in Finland and in turn being able to share prior knowledge about Finland. Having a family member that already lived in Finland for some years prior allowed the interviewee to see and hear about his experiences and gain the ability to anticipate and prepare for moving to Finland. The interviewee mentions that having a family member in Finland has eased the adaptation process, and as a result, the interviewee expresses that they have not experienced culture shock.

Despite mentioning feeling at home in Finland, the interviewee also mentions that they feel that they do not belong in Finnish society due to feeling that they are easily "othered" due to being "brown". They feel that it is obvious that they are not "Finn" or European, and therefore the interviewee feels that it is not possible to ever be "one of their own". The interviewee also mentions that they most definitely feel that racism is still prominent in Finland, and that it impacts how they feel about their position in society.

Despite mentions of the issue of racism, the interviewee also mentions not having an issue with Finnish society in general. They said that although Finnish society might have a problem with them, they have no problems with it whatsoever. The interviewee mentioned feeling "in between" in Finnish society in the sense that they don't feel that they belong to the diasporic communities in Finland because they are so different from people from their country in Asia, for example. On the other hand, they also do not feel that they belong to the native groups in Finland because they are not from Finland or Europe. In that way, the interviewee feels in between, not feeling a sense of belonging to the native or diasporic groups.

The interviewee expresses feeling most comfortable at home with their family member, or on the bus, when everyone is "in transit". On the bus, the interviewee expresses feeling a sense of belonging in a metaphorical sense due to everyone being in an "in between" phase and travelling between two destinations.

In terms of ability to adaptability, the interviewee describes being often quite adaptive. They enjoy being in foreign places and do not really mind it. In terms of a shared global culture, the interviewee mentions that growing up watching American sitcoms allowed them to grow up living vicariously in the “American way” despite being in Asia. The interviewee expresses how they feel that globalization has created an export of the American lifestyle onto everything else.

They feel as if many places have similar things, mentioning McDonald’s as an example of something that is all over the world. In this sense, the interviewee suggests that seeing a McDonald’s in almost any country that you travel to can mitigate the shock of being in a potentially new, shocking culture, as it is something shared and familiar in many different places. The interviewee also mentions how the English language is so widespread that it is often easy to communicate with people, and due to this, becoming culture shocked when travelling to a new country is less likely to occur.

Interview 4

Interviewee 4 is an international student originally from Eastern Europe.

Although the interviewee refers to themselves as an outsider, they also at the same time mention feeling really good and at home in Finland to a large degree. The interviewee mentions that the bureaucracy and government giving them student benefit helps them feel as if they belong in Finland from an institutional perspective.

The interviewee expresses feeling that the whole society feels more friendly and welcoming in comparison to their home country in Eastern Europe. The interviewee especially notes liking the Finnish mentality, the introverted culture and people keeping distance from each other as positives. In general, the interviewee feels that quality of life is higher in Finland than in their country in Eastern Europe.

The interviewee refers to their country in Eastern Europe and Finland as being both similar and different at the same time. They are similar in the sense that people mind their own business, but the interviewee feels that people in Finland are much happier.

In terms of culture shock, the interviewee states that they do not experience any. When travelling to different countries, the interviewee says that they always felt pretty comfortable everywhere, and that they did not pay much significance to their current geographical location. Despite that, although the interviewee expresses being comfortable in many places, they also make note that this is not the

same as feeling a sense of belonging. They do not feel that they belong to new places that they visit, but rather, it is just a different place and nothing more.

In terms of fitting in to Finland, the interviewee mentions that learning Finnish to a level that they would be happy with would make them feel a greater sense of adaptation. Other than that, however, the interviewee feels that they have integrated pretty well. They mention that having a Finnish partner has helped them gain sense of belonging. They also mention having a job as being important to their feeling of integrating well into Finnish society.

Overall, the interviewee appears to have mixed feelings in their sense of belonging. They feel as if support from their Finnish partner and aid from the Finnish government have made them feel that they belong in Finland to some extent, however, they still express feelings that they do not feel that they quite belong anywhere. The interviewee did not mention any particular reasons why they feel this way aside from their own personality and personal history potentially having an influence.

In terms of a shared, global culture, the interviewee expresses a feeling that every place shares something similar. They express that they feel that this is true especially in Europe. The interviewee mentions that language is especially helpful, as communicating in Europe is very easy because most people will probably speak one of the languages that they do.

Interview 5

The interviewee is an international student originally from a Dutch-speaking country in Central Europe, however they also lived in a second, different Dutch-speaking country from their original place of origin for several years.

In the interview, the interviewee self-identified as seeing themselves as a person who is from the low countries or the “Dutch-speaking” area of the world in a broader sense. They mention how the two countries that they previously lived in share a language and cultural overlap, but at the same time, there are also differences between the two countries.

When describing Finland, the interviewee particularly notes enjoying the quietness that it has to offer. They feel that the living circumstances in those two Dutch-speaking countries in general were not as good as in Finland for them. Prior to coming to Finland, the interviewee expresses that they did not feel that they belonged in the original Dutch-speaking country that they first lived in anymore after having lived in the second Dutch-speaking country for several years. They feel that the atmosphere felt fake in the sense that although they didn’t completely grow up living in the first Dutch-speaking country, as they moved to the second Dutch-speaking country after their early

childhood, and when they returned to the first Dutch-speaking country from the second Dutch-speaking country that they had lived in after several years, they were still treated as if they were one of them despite not having lived there for many years. The interviewee felt obtaining a sense of belonging would not be authentic since they had not grown up completely in the first Dutch-speaking country

Prior to coming to Finland, the interviewee knew only a little bit about Finland such as the role of alcohol, sauna, gambling, cold, snow and lakes. The interviewee compares the culture of the first Dutch-speaking country that they lived in to that of the culture of Finland, saying that they believe that the first Dutch-speaking country that they lived in has more Nordic aspects to it than people usually acknowledge. They mention a shared food culture due to both being cold countries, and a relationship with ice and sports. In the interviewee's opinion, the culture of the first Dutch-speaking country that they had lived in is closer to Finnish culture than that of the culture of the second Dutch-speaking country that they lived in for several years. Overall, they did not experience culture shock when moving to Finland, and they point out that the different overlaps the cultures of different European countries definitely plays a role in this. Rather interestingly, the interviewee claims that they probably would have had more culture shock if they had moved to Southern Europe or Post-Communist Europe.

Despite liking the Finnish culture for its quietness and praising the low stimulation environment, the interviewee expresses that they do not feel as if they are a part of Finnish society. They state that a major reason for this is not knowing how to speak Finnish. Despite that, the interviewee expresses that they feel that due to having a similar appearance to that of a stereotypical Finnish person, people do not automatically assume that they are not Finnish in supermarkets and other public places.

In this sense, the interviewee feels accepted by Finnish people until the moment when a Finnish person try to communicate with them and realizes that they have a Dutch background. Before being discovered in this way, the interviewee states that they feel considered and accepted as "one of them". The interviewee further expresses feeling that Finland has a somewhat superficial connection in the sense that as long as your appearance allows you to pass as a native Finn, you can blend in and gain a superficial sense of belonging, as people would not act xenophobic towards you just based on the first impression of one's appearance.

Interview 6

The interviewee is an international student originally from North America. They had visited Finland a lot prior to moving there due to their older relative being married to a Finn.

In the interview, the interviewee strongly expresses identifying culturally with their home country in North America. The interviewee states that this is because of, “how different Finland is from me.” They do not feel as if they share the underlying cultural assumptions present in Finland, which prevents them from feeling as if they fit in completely. An example of these cultural assumptions that the interviewee gave was of the culture in Finland of not talking to other people. The interviewee feels that in North America, people talk a lot more to strangers. They mention missing being able to have a casual conversation with people in the supermarket, for example.

The interviewee feels that the culture in North America is very different in many different ways, and it has made it even still hard for them to adjust despite having visited Finland during several summers as a child and knowing some of the language before moving to Finland. The interviewee mentions enjoying the more relaxed pace of life in Finland; on the other hand, they also state that they had a bit of culture shock when moving to Finland. The reserved nature of Finns was one of the biggest culture shocks for them.

Finland feels like home to the interviewee in the sense that they have some childhood familiarity and some family living in Finland, however overall, they do not feel as if they belong in the Finnish society. They identify as being a student, and they state that they spend most of their time with other international students and not Finnish people, therefore they feel a bit apart from Finnish society.

The interviewee also mentions not being a permanent resident as a major factor for not feeling as if they belong in Finland in the sense that on a bureaucratic level the government doesn't see you as a permanent part of Finnish society. They also mention that they are frustrated with government websites, as although they may say that they are available in English, they find that often those websites are only partially available in English and had a lot of missing information. In that sense, by not having government information available in English, the interviewee feels as if the government does not value them being in Finland or want them to be there in general.

Another major issue mentioned that creates a lack of feeling of proper integration into Finnish society was the interviewee's Finnish language skills. Despite having studied Finnish for 2 years, they are still not fluent in Finnish. The interviewee mentions feeling that lack of fluency definitely makes you feel like you are outside of Finnish society, as you need help with even basic tasks such as reading mail. They further add that not being able to do those tasks without help from a Finnish speaker reminds them all the time that they are an outsider.

Lastly, the interviewee expresses many times that they do not feel that they want to stay in Finland forever. They state that they are not committed to Finland, as they miss their home country and plan on some point to return to North America.

5.2. Contexts in which cosmopolitan identities are invoked

Considering how students invoked cosmopolitan identities in my data, I could identify roughly three contexts in which this was present: university, language, and when discussing their ability to adapt places easily due to cultural overlaps. Some students discussed cosmopolitan themes in the sense that they did not speak about culture in terms of being a divider or barrier. Also linked to cosmopolitanism, examples of students not experiencing culture shock are also presented in this section.

5.2.1. University

Some students express the feeling that the university they belong to has its own global community or society. This relates to the way that it allows international students and Finnish students to meet and connect. It has also allowed some to gain a sense of belonging in Finland as well despite having other issues related to integration, as expressed in the following quotations:

“I think there is a difference between-because I think it’s hard for me to answer whether or not I belong to the Finnish society because I feel like I belong to a society that exists in my university, but it’s very much made up of international students but also Finnish students.”

“...you have no frame of reference when it comes to the Finnish language. So that has been- that’s a difficult thing, but it hasn’t really caused me any trouble with feeling like I belonged because I had such a strong community connection to the student association, and the students that I met then.”

“I think especially being a part of a university that’s kind of different. Moving to a new country I think that’s a key detail. A university has its own community within it. If I just moved to Finland just for a job, for work, then that would be a much different experience... You would maybe have your colleagues, then you would really have to find another social group outside of that, but a university provides lots of avenues for making connections, and you know, to feel more at home. I guess necessarily once you do have friends, once you do have people you can talk to and rely on... Well,

it's definitely its own community and its own thing, so yeah that's been my biggest introduction to Finland just being at a Finnish university... But yeah, the university is obviously my biggest way into Finnish society and culture, which is great."

Linking this "university" context to cosmopolitanism theory, these quotes show that the interviewed international students describe belonging to a larger community, that of the community that they feel exists within Tampere University. This context can be said to support the points put forward in cosmopolitanism theories in the sense that despite being from different nationalities and countries, the international students and Finnish students are sharing and being part of the same community. Therefore, in this context, the international students are not placing importance on their individual cultures, as they are a part of this larger, international community. Despite that, it is important to note that the students' sense of belonging mentioned in these quotes is limited to their feeling a part of the university community, as is seen especially in the second quote.

5.2.2. Language

Some students mentioned that living in different places did not lead to them having a feeling of culture shock because they felt that most places have people that speak a language that they can understand. The following quotations express how some students felt that language was something that gave them a shared connection to many different cultures and countries:

"I don't understand the language here, but it hasn't been that big of a barrier for me because I think most of the people that I've- that I speak to speak English in a fine way."

"... I've been the U.S. and Indonesia, and I've been here and several places in Asia, but wherever I go, everyone knows what I'm talking about and everyone can speak the languages that I speak. If nothing else, I can find familiarity everywhere, right, so there's not so much to get shocked about."

"I don't have problem really communicating with any in Europe because everybody speaks one of the languages I speak probably."

In the context of "Language" these quotes express that there is a shared language in many parts of the world. From this, it can be implied that language barriers are not a major issue from the viewpoint of the students. They express that this is due to the fact that they believe that there are shared, global languages, which allows them to feel at ease in many different places including Finland. This supports cosmopolitan theory, as it shows that the participants express that they do feel that there is an existence of a shared language, which allows for a common unity among people. Despite that, it is not clear from the quotes if a shared language is always present all over

the world, as for example, one of the quotes only mentions this to be true in Europe. Another quote mentions the U.S., Indonesia, and Asia, but of course, this does not provide evidence on a truly global scale.

5.2.3. Discussing adaptability due to cultural overlaps

Some students felt that culture in Finland was not all that different from other places that they had lived. Some felt that they found it easy to adapt to new cultures due to the fact that they think that many cultures have similar characteristics to each other. Arguably, most of the students that felt similar cultural overlaps were from Europe, therefore it could be said from this that Europeans feel a sense of cosmopolitan culture between the European countries. Despite that, it is important to note that the student from Asia also felt that there were cultural overlaps. Additionally, globalization was mentioned in that case as well. Examples in the following quotes:

“I’m usually adaptive. I like being in foreign places and just being in existence, so yeah, I don’t really like mind. Yeah, I’m adaptive so it doesn’t really matter where I am...: Like so I grew up watching American sitcoms, and that’s how I learned English, that’s why I sound like this. I guess my entire life I’ve been stuck with the TV and to movie screens, so I’ve kind of lived my life vicariously in the American way despite my situations being non-American. I think that sort of globalization has created that export of the America onto everything else. I feel like a lot of places are- whether or not you like it, I mean there’s a McDonalds I can also go back to. So, even if there is shock, it’s mitigated quite easily.

“I think way of life is not that different from Central Europe or from where I come from. I think people are maybe a little bit more reserved, but not in a hostile- not in a don’t want to talk to you kind of way, but more I’m being considerate in public spaces kind of way. I find people- I don’t know I find Tampere very kind- kind and calm are like two words I would put on this. So, I don’t consider it that much different and I think it’s really- I find myself very at home here.”

When being asked whether or not the student from Eastern Europe felt that the way of life in Finland was different from their country in Eastern Europe, the student responded with:

“I think it’s both very similar and very different at the same time. Similar in the sense that people mostly mind their own business, but in Finland they are much happier. Like in Eastern Europe it’s pretty standard that if you go to anything or anywhere in public, it’s taken for granted that people will be mean to you. If you have to deal with anything official it’s not going to be a good day.”

In the context of ‘discussing adaptability due to cultural overlaps’, as seen in the first quote, the international student from Asia clearly expresses cosmopolitan views, even mentioning globalization. They stated that they felt that due to the effects of globalization being prominent throughout their life, it has allowed them to feel minimal culture shock when going to different parts of the world, as globalization has mitigated it.

In the second quote, the Central European student does not express that there are impactful differences between the Central European culture and Finnish culture, and as a result, they feel at home in Finland. This notion of feeling at home in different places can be linked to cosmopolitanism.

In the third quote from the Eastern European student, it is clear that they create some differences between their own culture and Finnish culture. Despite that, at the same time, they do not place a large amount of importance on differences in some of the aspects of the two cultures. Therefore, the Eastern European student, when describing the meaning of culture in this context, can be said to express both nationalistic and cosmopolitan views.

5.3. Contexts in which nationalist identities invoked

Considering how students invoked nationalist identities in their accounts, I could identify roughly five contexts in which this was present: shopping, language, university, lack of or no Finnish friends, and when they feel excluded from Finnish society due to having a non-Finnish background or appearance. Examples when students felt culture shock and how these relate to themes of nationalism are also presented in this section.

5.3.1. Shopping

Shopping is mentioned by many of the students interviewed. It is considered to be a general, mundane daily or at least almost daily task, therefore it seems to have been important for them to mention how their shopping experience went. The following quotations express how some international students felt that shopping in Finland made them have difficulties in their feeling of being properly integrated, or they felt culture shock from their shopping experience:

“...think just kind of like random things. One like the thing of not talking to other people and, also, that kind of shared cultural history like that the knowledge that you grow up with, and those kinds of things that you do. Like, I really like to drive and I miss driving, and I kind of- just sort of small things like in the North America you grocery shop for 2 weeks of food at home, not every other day, and you buy like fresh vegetables and stuff, and I kind of miss because able to do those sorts of things.”

“I definitely think I experienced a little bit of culture shock and feeling like- especially with the more like reserved nature of Finns like sometimes I really was like oh my god I wish someone would talk to me at the store.”

In the context of ‘shopping’, in the first quote, the student mentions that they start to miss their home country, the North America, when they are grocery shopping in Finland. In this way, they place importance on the differing shopping cultures in North America and Finland. Aspects of nationalism theory can be seen from this, as the student distinguishes clear differences between their home country’s culture and the culture of Finland. In turn, this makes them describe the cultural differences as hindering their ability to feel comfortable, at home, and thus, integrated into the Finnish culture and society.

In the second quote, the student clearly expresses feelings of culture shock while grocery shopping, and this can be said to signify that the student does not invoke cosmopolitan ideas when discussing Finnish shopping culture. Despite that, I would not say that this quote invokes nationalism, as the student does not refer to their own country when making a point about the differing culture in this case, but nevertheless, the student conveys discomfort in what they describe as a differing Finnish culture.

5.3.2. Language

Some students express feeling excluded and separated from Finnish society and Finnish-speaking people due to their lack of sufficient Finnish language skills. In the following quotations, they explain that not knowing the language can be a huge burden on their ability to gain a sense of belonging in Finland:

“...however, I think me feeling like I’m at all integrated into Finnish society I don’t feel that way. I think language is obviously the biggest barrier, I don’t speak the language. I think with that comes lots of... just challenges of, you know, figuring the essentials of getting food, a bus card, figuring

out how to register my status. You know all of those things, that, obviously you are able to, but, yeah.”

“I think to feel included and part of a culture I think- language is a massive aspect of that because with language that feeds into just cultural norms that I don’t quite know, and but yeah.”

“I don’t feel like I’m part of Finnish society because I don’t speak Finnish, that’s the main thing.”

“I think Finnish language is a big thing. I mean I studied Finnish for 2 years and I’m not anywhere near fluent in Finnish. And I think that in a lot of ways that makes you definitely feel like you’re outside of Finland because I need so much help just to do like regular-like read mail that I get sometimes or when I moved here to like fill out forms that I needed to fill out for like, the government purposes.”

“Like so many government websites, they may say that they are available in English, but only partially, like some information that you want is not translated into English. So many forms that I wanted- that I needed to fill out are not in English. And those sorts of things really made me feel like they don’t value me being here. Or like, want me to be here, so I think- that is like part of it. I think Finland wants to keep you separate from them. Like they don’t see you the same.”

In the first quote of the context of ‘language’, the student indicates that they do not feel as if they are valued in Finland due to the lack of important information available in English. In this sense, this student could be argued to feel ‘othered’, which, according to nationalist theory, only occurs when there is acceptance of the existence of individual nation-states, national identities, and national borders. In this sense, nationalism theory is linked to this feeling of being unwanted and not feeling as if one belongs in the society of a nation.

This feeling of not belonging is also especially conveyed in the second quote of this section, as the student in this example mentions that lacking Finnish language skills excludes them from learning and engaging in Finnish cultural norms. In this sense, the integration process is clearly hindered by this. This shows that this student clearly feels that learning Finnish cultural norms is vital to them feeling as if they belong in the society, therefore this view portrays a nationalistic mindset, as it places importance on individual cultures of nations rather than invoking one feeling a part of a global culture that transcends national borders, which is the case in cosmopolitanism perspectives.

5.3.3. University

Some students expressed feeling excluded due to international student unions in the university having their own community that feels separated from the Finnish-speaking student unions and their formed communities. Some also expressed feeling bound to that community formed in their university circles, and otherwise, they feel excluded from the rest of Finnish society:

“I think there’s not a lot of integration with the other student associations- the unions that are Finnish speaking- with a Finnish speaking majority. Like we are pretty much the ones that are from international degrees...that is kind of a closed circle and there is not a lot of engagement with the Finnish that are not part of those programs.”

“...but that’s more university-related, but it’s most of my life it’s just happening at university. So, I feel a strong sense of belonging in that area and that community, but I think it’s difficult to say about Finnish society in general.”

“But yeah, the university is obviously my biggest way into Finnish society and culture, which is great. But, again I’m only around people my age and, yeah, but there’s definitely a community. That’s its own community and so yeah when you think about stereotypes of Finland, you know, your only kind of- at least me I feel I only have a snapshot of- that’s my main thing I’m exposed to. Obviously going out to stores and restaurants, you see people, you see what the rest of what society is like, but ultimately a lot of us students, yeah, we’re all within the confines of the university and that’s different. Yeah, so I guess it does kind of have its own society in a way.”

“I feel a part of my university community, but the society in general in Finland I don’t feel included, I don’t feel excluded, I just don’t feel a part of it.”

“...And I think in some respects it still kind of feels like being a student and because I also spend almost all of my time with other international students and not with Finnish people, I feel a bit apart from Finnish society.”

On the other side of the coin, although the context of university also invokes cosmopolitan ideas at times, in the quotes above, the students express how the university community is rather limiting, and they feel confined to it. In all the quotes, the students indicate feeling excluded from Finnish people in the university.

In the first quote, this is due to the Finnish-speaking majority being part of different programs at the university that do not engage often with the English-speaking international programs. In this way, this creates a feeling of separation and exclusion from Finnish people and on a larger scale, the Finnish society. In the second quote, the student conveys not feeling a part of the general Finnish

society, but rather, they feel a part of the university community which only constitutes part of it. In the third quote, the student mentions that they spend time with other international students, but not Finnish students, which leads to them feeling excluded from Finnish society in a sense.

From these quotes, it can undoubtedly be argued that national identities are placed high in importance in this context, as according to these international students, Finnish people occupy a seemingly separate, unattainable, and more prominent part of Finnish culture that international students do not feel a part of.

5.3.4. Lack of or no Finnish friends

Some students felt that not having or having very few Finnish friends made them feel separated from Finnish culture and society. The following quotations express this:

“I think I do now I mean I definitely don’t feel like I’m a Finn or anything- I would say. And I think in some respects it still kind of feels like being a student and because I also spend almost all of my time with other international students and not with Finnish people, I feel a bit apart from Finnish society.”

“And also like not having very many Finnish friends- or having Finnish friends but spending less time with them than maybe I do with other friends, because they have other friends and family here that they see, so then it also kind of reminds you that you’re not a permanent fixture of being here.”

In these quotes, it can be seen that lacking or not having Finnish friends has led to the students feeling as if they are not truly a part of Finnish society. These quotes convey nationalist ideas, as the students place importance on having to know the locals on a personal level in order to feel a sense of belonging in Finland. This also relates to the concept of ‘othering’, as it can be argued that the international students feel as if they are excluded from Finnish society as a result of not having friends that possess a national identity and are native to Finland.

5.3.5. Feeling excluded from Finnish society due to non-Finnish background or appearance

Some students felt that they did not feel as if they could feel integrated into Finnish society due to having a non-Finnish background. They voiced opinions that they were not treated the same as people that fit the stereotypical assumption of what a Finnish looks like, or they felt discriminated

against once people found out that they did not speak the Finnish language. In this sense, they were felt “othered” by native Finns.

“So, I don’t feel I belong in Finnish society. But that’s mostly because of how easily “othered” I can be if that makes any sense. Like I’m obviously not “Finn”. It comes true in the way that I interact with people in the street and the kind of harassment I’ve faced here. I mean, I would really like to belong here and I feel like this is a place I would like to live for the rest of my life, but I don’t think that at any point I’m gonna feel like I belong here because I’m never gonna be one of their own.”

“In the sense, for instance I’m brown and it shows. I don’t think being as outspoken and as brown as I am that I will ever be natively Finn. And I do think that still exists; if people say there is no racism here, I would beg to disagree.”

“...people don’t assume that I’m not Finnish because I’m a white person. They only “change” when they realize that I don’t speak Finnish, then they find out that I’m not one of them.”

In the quotes above, it can evidently be seen that ‘othering’ is felt by the international students, which is linked to nationalistic ideas. In the first quote, the student in fact refers to this concept, and they support this feeling by further explaining that they will never live up to the standard that they strongly believe is in place in Finland. In this case, the standard refers to how one can be perceived as a “Finn”, and the student feels that they cannot be accepted in Finnish society due to their ethnicity.

In the second quote, the student feels as if they are not ‘othered’ due to their ethnicity, but rather, when someone tries to speak to them, it becomes obvious that they are not from Finland originally because they do not speak Finnish. In both the quotes of this section, ideas of nationalism can be observed, as both students feel as if they cannot be accepted into Finnish culture and society due to them feeling that they do not fit the accepted ideals of what makes a Finnish person in Finland.

5.4. Contexts in which ambiguous meanings are attached to culture

In general, in some contexts, it was difficult to separate cosmopolitan and nationalist talks. This section includes contexts that were difficult to decipher the meanings attached as either invoking cosmopolitan theories, or as containing themes of nationalism. As a result, these contexts can be described as instances when the students invoked a neutral tone regarding culture, or these contexts did not seem to invoke a clearly defined meaning. In some instances, ideas related to both

cosmopolitanism and nationalism appear to be invoked on some level. The contexts in which it was difficult to categorize what meanings were attached to culture were: discussing the prior knowledge and knowledge that international students had of Finnish culture before coming to Finland, discussing what the international like about Finnish culture, and having a significant other or family in Finland.

5.4.1. Discussing the prior knowledge and assumptions that they had of Finnish culture before coming to Finland

When discussing stereotypes and prior to knowledge that the students had about Finland and its culture, the students speak in quite a neutral tone as seen in the following quotations:

“The only knowledge that I had is based on the heavy stereotypical or like, yeah, stereotypes that Scandinavians have about Finns.”

“I think people are maybe a little bit more reserved but not in a hostile- not in a don’t want to talk to you kind of way but more I’m being considerate in public spaces kind of way.”

“I think way of life is not that different from Central Europe or from where I come from...well yeah. Like Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland...All those are societies are quite similar I think.”

“Yeah, I think at least me growing up in North America we definitely have, I think, certain, ingrained perceptions of this area and of Nordic and Scandinavian countries. Just that the quality of life is much higher, and that, you know, we know them as being the happiest people.”

“My family member had lived here for 2 years before I moved, and so I had seen Finland through video call and heard their experiences about how people are quiet and keep to themselves.”

In quotes one, two, and three, the students mention that they knew about stereotypes and other notions that make Finland different from the country and culture that they come from, but they do not place importance on these differences. The differences, therefore, did not lead to the students expressing ideas that linked to nationalism. Despite that, there also is not any evidence in the quotes which indicate that the students invoke culture from a point of view that could be linked to cosmopolitan ideas.

5.4.2. Discussing what they like about Finnish culture

Despite having an emotional context in the sense that some students express what they specifically like about Finnish culture, they speak in a rather neutral tone when discussing general or abstract aspects of Finnish culture. The following quotations mostly suggest that some of the participants express feeling at home in Finland, however in my opinion, this does not equate to a feeling of global citizenship or invoking nationalism, therefore I classified these quotations as being neutral:

“I like the Finnish mentality. I really fit in here...I feel at home in Finland”.

“I think just the whole society as much as I have dealt with it is very nice to me. I do feel like I fit in here.”

“The peace and quiet is lovely and I feel tranquil here, so I do feel at home here.” “...really enjoy- I love the country. I’ve never loved a place so much before because I have so much peace and quiet.”

“...there’s a lot more air to breathe in a literal and metaphorical ways.”.

“Because of my mental health issues living in a low stimulation environment is just good.”

“Kind of the more relaxed pace was also like really appealing.”

From the quotes above, the students are stating aspects of Finnish culture that they enjoy, however, they do not elaborate on their feelings in these cases. In this sense, although in the first quote the student indicates that they feel at home due to the Finnish mentality, in my opinion, this is not information to fully indicate if the student invokes a cosmopolitan mindset.

There is the same issue when trying to observe if the students’ express ideas related to nationalism in this context. The students are expressing what they like in Finland, but they are not making comparisons to the culture that they are familiar with. Hence, there is not enough information in the quotes in this context to truly say if they are invoking nationalism or cosmopolitanism.

Despite that, it is important to stress that the students still attach meanings to the aspects of Finnish culture that they mention, however, the meanings in these instances are difficult to link to one specific theory.

5.4.3. Having a significant other or family in Finland

Although one may assume that having a significant other or family member living in Finland could help in gaining a sense of belonging, some students had mixed feelings on if they felt a sense of

belonging in Finland despite some having strong ties there, therefore it is hard to classify this context as invoking cosmopolitanism or nationalism:

“I feel a bit apart from Finnish society. But I definitely feel like because I’m familiar with it and because I have family here. In those respects, I do think that it’s home because it has this kind of like, uh, childhood familiarity for me.”

“I think to a pretty large degree I do feel I belong here. Well, that’s partly because I am in a relationship with someone who was born here, and considers Finland his home, and I’ve already lived here several years, so it’s something I guess you get used to... Well, I guess it has many levels. At a personal level, I never feel like I belong anywhere, so that would be a different answer. “

“I didn’t have culture shocks. I was able to adapt quite easily, again, because I had my family member here... sort of eased me into a lot of things. I could anticipate that people were going to be quiet, and that I knew from my tutor that I need to I don’t know I guess not talk to strangers unless I want them to get startled. Yeah, I guess I adapted pretty quickly but I guess that is also because I sort of knew what I was getting into... So, I don’t feel I belong in Finnish society. But that’s mostly because of how easily “othered” I can be if that makes any sense. Like I’m obviously not “Finn”. It comes true in the way that I interact with people in the street and the kind of harassment I’ve faced here.”

In the case of having a significant other or family living in Finland, the students invoke feelings that make the quotes and context difficult to categorize in relation to a specific theory. All the quotes indicate that the international students did feel some sense of belonging in Finnish society as a result of their relatives or family member, which could link to cosmopolitanism. On the other hand, however, the quotes also all indicate that the students still do not feel as if they fully belong in Finnish society, which could be linked to nationalism. In this sense, this context is difficult to categorize as being linked to one theory. The quotes all indicate aspects of both nationalism and cosmopolitan theory, and that makes it difficult to categorize them.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis, I set out to study how international students used culture as a sense-making tool when accounting for their ability to integrate into Finnish society. I drew upon nationalism and cosmopolitanism theories in order to observe how they constructed culture and what meanings they

attached to it. I wanted to observe if they placed importance on differences between the culture that they are familiar with and Finnish culture, and if they did so, observe if this impacted the understanding of their integration. I also wanted to identify if they spoke in ways that conveyed ideas related to cosmopolitanism, nationalism, or if neither theory was clearly identifiable in their discussions. Different contexts in which cultural identities were invoked were analyzed.

6.1. Summary of data and methods used

In order to analyze how international students accounted for their ability to integrate into Finnish society, I conducted interviews using a qualitative data approach. This thesis aimed to investigate the meanings that the international students attached to culture, therefore, using a qualitative approach allowed for more personal and in-depth responses. Six international students were interviewed separately and asked open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview style, and the questions attempted to lead the participants into discussion related to culture and cultural integration. The interviews were then transcribed using content analysis, and the findings of this thesis were gathered from this data.

6.2. Analysis of the main findings

The empirical data used in this thesis consisted of the quotes taken from the interviews. It is important to note that the findings in this thesis were not meant as definite findings which could always be applied to people of the same background as those that were interviewed in this thesis, but rather, these are the findings that were found from my data in particular.

My findings revealed that highly skilled migrants do in fact also suffer from othering just as asylum seekers and other marginalized migrant groups do when going through the processes of social and cultural integration. This was seen from the quotes, when some international students expressed feeling othered due to their appearance or due to their lack of Finnish language skills.

In this study, I tested some aspects of cosmopolitan theory, and I found that international students invoked cosmopolitan themes in contexts related to university, language, and when they discussed adaptability due to culture overlaps. In the context of university, some of the international students portrayed themselves as belonging to a larger community which exists in Tampere University. In

this way, they spoke in a cosmopolitan nature, as despite being from different nationalities and countries, the international students and Finnish share this space and community in the university. The international students, in this way, did not place importance on their individual cultures when discussing the community present in the university.

In the context of language, some of the international students felt that there was a shared language in many parts of the world. In this way, they did not portray language barrier as a major issue when integrating into Finland, as they expressed that there are often shared languages in many parts of the world. These views support aspects of cosmopolitan theory, as they show that some of the participants spoke in a way that they expressed believing that shared language allows there to be a common connection among people on a global scale.

In the context of discussing adaptability due to cultural overlaps, the Asian student mentioned that as a result of globalization being prominent their whole life, they felt minimal culture shock wherever they travelled. Interconnectedness and cosmopolitan themes are clearly recognizable from this account. The Central European student expressed not feeling notable differences between Central European culture and Finnish culture. This expression of feeling at home in different places is linked to cosmopolitanism. The Eastern European student expressed feeling that Finnish culture and Eastern European culture are both similar and different at the same time, which could be said to invoke both nationalistic and cosmopolitan views. Despite that, the Eastern European student did not make claims that the differences between cultures felt hindering on their ability to integrate, and in this sense, their way of thinking leans more towards a cosmopolitan mindset.

I tested some aspects of nationalism theory, and findings showed that the international students invoked nationalist themes in contexts related to shopping, language, university, lack of or not Finnish friends, and feeling excluded from Finnish society due to non-Finnish background or appearance. In the context of shopping, one student felt that shopping in Finland resulted in them missing their home country located in North America. The student in this way is clearly showing that they consider the cultures of Finland and North American culture to be different enough to affect the accounts of their integration. In this sense, these feelings can be linked to ideas portrayed in nationalism theory. The same student also mentions feeling culture shock while shopping, which further supports the idea that they are not invoking cosmopolitan ideas when discussing their view on the shopping culture in Finland.

In the context of language, it was found that one student expresses not feeling valued and othered in Finland. This links to nationalism theory, as othering is only able to occur if there is an acceptance

that national borders, individual nation-states, and national identities exist. The student does not feel that they belong in Finland due to not feeling that they are a valued member in the society. Another student mentioned that not knowing the Finnish language was a big issue, as it prevents them from engaging and learning Finnish cultural norms. In this way, their integration process is hindered, and as a result, their sense of belonging in Finnish society. This view portrays a nationalistic mindset, as importance is being placed on individual cultures, in this case, the Finnish culture.

Observing the university context, some students expressed that they felt that their university community was limited to only international students, as was little or no interaction with Finnish students. In this way, the Finnish-speaking majority in other programs at the university were separated from the English-speaking international programs. This created feelings of exclusion from Finnish people. On a larger scale, some students felt that they were limited to the confines of the university community, and therefore, they were excluded from the rest of the Finnish society outside of the university. These link to ideas of nationalism, as the international students in this context place nationalistic identities high in importance, as it is a clear separator in the context of university. In this way, the international students constructed the view that Finnish people occupy a more prominent, unattainable part of Finnish culture that they do not feel a part of.

In the context of lacking Finnish friends, some students felt that having Finnish friends was important for gaining a sense of belonging in Finnish society. This conveys nationalist thoughts, as the international students in this case placed importance on having to know local people in order to feel a sense of belonging in Finland.

When discussing the context of feeling excluded from Finnish society due to non-Finnish background or appearance, it was found that one student felt that they could never live up to the standard and be truly accepted in Finland due to feeling that they do not appear conventionally Finnish from their appearance. Another student mentioned feeling that they do not feel othered due to their ethnicity, but rather, because they are not originally from Finland and cannot communicate in Finnish when they are spoken to by Finnish people. Othering is prominent in these two ways in this context, and this concept can be linked to nationalism theory.

It is important to note that it was not easy to categorize the findings in this study. Although cosmopolitanism and nationalism theories were used as frames of reference when investigating in what cultural contexts international students invoked these themes, sometimes it was not clear which meaning they attached to culture. Due to this difficulty, this third section was created. The contexts that were difficult to categorize were: Discussing the prior knowledge and assumptions

that international students had of Finnish culture before coming to Finland, discussing what the international like about Finnish culture, and having a significant other or family in Finland.

In the context of discussing prior knowledge and assumptions that international students had of Finnish culture, it was found that students mentioned their previous assumptions, stereotypes, and other ideas related to Finland. However, they did not place importance on the differences that they described. Due to this, links in this context could not be made to nationalism. Despite not placing importance on cultural differences in some cases being linked to having a cosmopolitan mindset, there also was no evidence found that indicated that the students invoked a cosmopolitan way of thinking in this case, either.

When discussing the context of what they liked about Finnish culture, the quoted Finnish students mentioned aspects of Finnish culture that they especially liked and enjoyed, however they all spoke in a rather neutral tone that could not be linked clearly to nationalism or cosmopolitanism.

In the context of having a significant other or family in Finland, the students portrayed mixed feelings. The findings indicated that international students did feel some sense of belonging in Finland as a result of their relatives or family member, which can be linked to cosmopolitanism. On the other hand, the findings also showed that students did not feel as if they fully belonged in Finnish society despite having family or a relative in Finland with them. In this way, this can be linked to nationalism, and therefore, this context is difficult to categorize because in all the findings, the international students attached both cosmopolitan and nationalistic meanings to culture simultaneously.

6.3. Contribution of the study and link to existing literature

In this study, I was able to find different contexts in which international students invoked cosmopolitan or nationalist identities when integrating to Finland. Through observing these contexts, I was able to identify how international students constructed and attached different meanings to culture during integration. In this way, it could also be observed how they used culture as a tool during integration. In these ways, this study contributes especially to literature linked to social and cultural integration. Additionally, from these findings, it is possible to gain a better understanding of the importance that culture can play during integration, and how it can be used as a frame of reference when international students are trying to understand a new culture. By gaining insight on problems that the students mentioned, this study may also provide tools for decision

makers seeking to design policies that facilitate integration processes among different immigrant groups.

Previous literature showed that mainstream interpretations of migrants in Finland tended to not perceive migrants as highly skilled (Valtonen, 2010). When discussing the topic of othering, previous literature has not often focused on highly skilled migrants in their data, but rather, it focused on migrants being portrayed as marginalized from the moment they arrived in Finland, which is for example the case with asylum seekers (Keskinen, 2016). There has been a lack of previous research on highly skilled migrants and the difficulties that they face during integration in general (Penninx, 2019). From my findings, I was able to add to existing literature by showing that international students also suffer from othering during the social and cultural integration process despite being classified as highly skilled migrants.

Halsall (2009) linked the notion of feeling at home anywhere to having a cosmopolitan attitude. I tested this aspect of cosmopolitanism theory in my thesis. Interviewed international students in this study often expressed if or if they did not feel a sense of belonging or at home in Finland in different contexts. The empirical findings related to the students' feelings of sense of belonging made in this study can add to the existing cosmopolitanism literature and debate.

Nationalism theory mentions the concept of othering in a way that refers to othered people as stateless people (Malkki, 1995). In a sense, my findings can support this point of view, as othered international students expressed feelings that they did not belong in Finland. From my findings, I was able to discover that international students felt othered due to their appearance or background not being the same as that of a stereotypical Finnish friend. They also felt othered especially in the contexts of shopping and university. The findings I made can add to the existing research related to othering and nationalism literature.

Moufakkir (2013) discussed the concept of culture shock and its links to both the theories used in this thesis. In my findings, I have both examples of when some international students described experiencing culture shock and when others described not experiencing it. In this way, I was able to test culture shock and its impact on my participants. Hence, I hope, the findings I have made can add to debate different migrants groups experiencing culture shock.

This study supports findings by Kim (2004), who stated that a person entering a new culture will become aware of their previously taken for granted norms and habits shaped by culture. In this study, it was found that international students do, in some instances, compare the Finnish culture to

the culture that they are familiar with. In this way, the students use the culture that they are familiar with as a frame of reference in trying to gain understanding of the new, Finnish culture.

Gentin et al. (2019) stated that culture is linked closely to integration. This is supported by this study, as it can be seen for example in the context of language; in this context, one international student expressed that they felt that they cannot feel integrated into Finnish society without understanding Finnish cultural norms, and these are not accessible to them without knowing the Finnish language. Remennick (2006) also mentioned the importance of acquisition of the host language when immigrants come to live in a new country. This was further supported by Kim (2006), who stated that without language, culture of a society cannot be fully acquired, expressed, or transmitted.

Shumilova et al. (2012) mentioned some cultural differences having impact on integration, however they focused on the economic impact of cultural differences. This thesis helps fill a research gap by contributing to research discussing the impact of cultural differences; this was done by discovering meanings that international students attached to culture when accounting for their ability to integrate into Finnish society.

6.4. Limitations of the study and ideas for future research

As this study was limited to only six participants, future research could have a larger sample size. It is also important to note that the students interviewed in this thesis were only from one small national student organization, therefore future research should expand on this.

Taking participants from only one student organization could be suggested to be a limitation, as the students could be like-minded because they are studying similar subjects when being part of the same student organization. In the future, it could be suggested that by expanding the data so that participants are taken from many different student organizations, it could be possible that points of views of the students could differ more prominently. In this way, it would be interesting to see the same study conducted with a larger, more diverse group of students from multiple different student organizations, or students studying subjects considered vastly different and unrelated. Future research could include samples from different countries. Another suggestion would be to collect data from different time periods to see how integration talk and the emphasis put on culture and

cultural identity therein develops. I would also be interested in studying how certain events such as pandemics and related policy measures impact individuals' integration accounts and their cultural identifications.

7. ETHICS

Ethical considerations were taken into account when conducting the interviews used as the primary data for this thesis. The interviews conducted in this thesis are anonymous. The names, majors, and other specific details potentially exposing students' identities are not mentioned. For example, I replaced the names of the home countries of the interviewees to regions and continents that they come from in order to further protect their identities. In a similar vein, words referring to individuals' partners and specific family members were replaced with words such as 'family member' or 'relative' in order to further anonymize my interviewees.

Before the Skype interviews, I gave a participant consent form to every participant, which explained the nature of the interview and the purpose that it would be used for. Prior to the interview, I clarified with the interview participants that they agreed to the interview being recorded in the participant consent form. I also confirmed once more that the participants agreed to the contents of the participant consent form and to being interviewed just before the interview occurred. Data was stored on my personal computer in a secure folder. The data will be destroyed after this thesis has been published.

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